

over another, and, contrary to the claims of its opponents, H.R. 5449 does not preordain the conclusion of the negotiations between the FAA and NATCA.

MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH BY
STAFF SERGEANT JOSEPH M.
DIMOND

HON. CURT WELDON

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 8, 2006

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I would like to enter the following Memorial Day speech into the RECORD. It was made by Staff Sergeant Joseph M. Dimond. I am sure that you, and all who hear these words, will be moved by this unforgettable tribute to those who have fallen in the service of their country:

MEMORIAL DAY

Good morning and happy Memorial Day!

Memorial Day means many different things to many different people. To some it means BBQ's and beer, to some its just another long weekend to relax, to some it's the beginning of summer, but to people like me, and I'm guessing people like you since you are here, it means a lot more!

Since I was a boy, Memorial Day has always had a special meaning to me. I remember at 8 and 9 years old following my father, a Korean War Vet, around East Lansdowne and Upper Darby while he and his fellow American Legion brothers fired off 21 gun salutes at all the memorials. I would run around collecting all the shells from the rifles and save them as my own little memorial. Afterwards, we would put flags on the graves of all the Veterans in Fernwood Cemetery. I'm not even sure if I understood completely what we were honoring. I just knew it was very important! I knew, that for some reason, every time I heard TAPS or the National Anthem played, I would get teary eyed, but I don't think I ever really grasped the importance of it all.

Unfortunately, over the past year I had the chance to find out first hand what it all meant, why I would cry, why I felt the way I've been feeling for my entire life. I have experienced many difficult times in my life, but nothing could prepare me for the last year! You see, I was in charge of security for the bomb squad for the entire city of Fallujah. While over there, we dismantled 362 roadside bombs and, unfortunately, got hit by some too.

One of the many downfalls of being with the bomb squad in the most violent city in Iraq is that whenever an American or Iraqi soldier is killed by a roadside bomb or suicide bomber, we have to go and make sure all of the ordnance that is in the vehicles when they blow up are stabilized, and removed before the mortuary affairs people can come in and remove the bodies, so long story short, we were forced to work around the bodies of every ally killed by a bomb in Fallujah and the surrounding area. While doing this, my team had to remain calm, keep our heads and not get tied up in what we were seeing, because the bomb squad was a huge target, and I needed to do my best to keep them safe while they focused on their jobs. We were successful most of the time, but did have some bad luck too. Since October 15th, six of my very good friends were killed on the streets of Fallujah, five of which happened while I was there, all in separate incidents. One happened a week after I left Iraq, while my friend John was finishing his last week of a 9 month tour.

These men were all heroes! Whatever your politics, whether you believe we should be in this war or not, whether you are Republican or Democrat, we are all Americans! And I want to make sure you all know this: every single soldier, sailor, airman, and marine over there is there for you! They all feel they are doing what they have to do to make life better for you, our kids and me. I'm not a politician, and this isn't the time or place for politics, but the #1 question I've been asked in the past 2 months since I've been home is "Do I think we should be there?" Well, my answer to that is very simple, I don't know if we should have gone over there, but I, like these men we honor today, was asked to go so I went. I'm an enlisted man, and leave that to the people that sit behind their desks and make the big decisions. What I do know as a grunt on the ground, looking these people in the eye, day after day, is that I've never seen or imagined the hate, evil or torture that man is capable of until now! I also have no doubt that these people that I was fighting hate you, they hate all of us because we believe in a different God, they hate us because we allow our daughters and sisters to walk around malls in belly shirts, they hate us because we are different from them, they hate us because we are free!

In an America filled with violent movies, video games and violent everything else, we've all become a little desensitized. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked by naive people, "How many people have you killed?" Like it is a cool thing or something. Only someone who hasn't seen or done the things I have would ask such a question with a smile on their face. And I try to be understanding of the fact that they haven't seen it, but at the same time I feel a responsibility to let them know that there is nothing cool about people losing their lives. Whether they are wrong or deserved it or not, there will be a family mourning, somewhere.

More importantly I feel the responsibility to explain to those people who may not know better, that regardless of what Hollywood may want you to believe, there is no glory in a twenty-something year old man dying violently in the dirt thousands of miles away from his home, away from family, and the people he loves. It is important to me that people recognize and understand how devastating it is when an American, a friend, dies in such a violent way. The hurt and grief one feels when witnessing a twenty-year-old kid, who you personally trained, die in a hellhole thousands of miles away from his home is indescribable! Promising to tell a man's unborn child that her daddy loved her while he bleeds to death because it is too dangerous for a helicopter to come into the city to medivac him is something no human being should have to ever experience. Listening to a friend ask as he is dying if you think God will forgive him for all the things he had to do over here is not glamorous in any way, shape or form.

But most importantly, I feel a responsibility to explain that these men that we honor today were not looking for Glory or medals or memorials! They were all just doing what they felt was right, they were men doing the job that nobody wants! Living in misery, so the people they love could live in happiness! Dying horrible deaths, so the ones they love can live on in peace! That is why they are heroes, and that is why they deserve our thoughts, time and respect at least for this one day of the year!

There is a saying in the war fighting community that says:

"We are the unwanted, doing the impossible, for the ungrateful." Well, now that I'm moving on to the civilian sector again, I'm here to say that not everyone is ungrateful my brothers!

I've seen enough bloodshed for twenty lifetimes! And I pray for peace just as every true warrior prays for peace!

For me, every day is Memorial Day, and it is because of men like these:

Mark Adams, killed by a roadside bomb at age 24, on October 15th 2005.

Joel Dameron, killed by a roadside bomb at age 27 on 30 Oct 2005, his wife has since had their baby girl.

Michael Presley, killed by a suicide bomber at age 21 on Dec 14th 2005.

Ryan McCurdey, killed at age 20 by a sniper while dragging a wounded Marine to safety on 5 Jan 2006.

Nick Wilson, killed at age 25 by a secondary bomb while dismantling another bomb on 12 Feb 2006. He had 4 days left in the country.

John Fry, killed at age 28 by a roadside bomb on 8 March 2006, 8 days after I left the country, and 6 before he was leaving.

So, today, when you are barbecuing or spending time relaxing with your family, please take a minute and remember these men who sacrificed so much, and remember their families who are living without husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. And if you see someone who doesn't take that time, remind them of all that is done for them!

I'm not much of a speaker, and I'm not sure if I did these men justice, but when I was asked to speak I felt like it was the least I could do to remind people that these men aren't just numbers to follow on the news, but men with families and lives that they gave up for you and me. I have no doubt that I will see these men's faces in my sleep every night, and think of them at least once a day for the rest of my life. I'm just asking you to take a moment out of one day a year to remember them and the many other Americans that died before them.

God Bless, and have a great Memorial Day!

KIRSTEN SHORTRIDGE—GATORADE
NATIONAL GIRLS SOFTBALL
PLAYER OF THE YEAR

HON. MICHAEL C. BURGESS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 8, 2006

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Ms. Kirsten Shortridge for being selected as the 2006 Gatorade National Girls Softball Player of the Year.

Of the more than three-hundred and fifty-thousand student girl athletes across the country, only one person is chosen to receive this award. The honor, which also factors in academic achievements and overall character, has been awarded for 20 years to athletes in ten different sports.

Kirsten is batting .554 with two home runs, eight triples and twenty-five RBIs. In 181 innings she has pitched 365 strikeouts, 21 shut-outs and eight no-hitters, including three perfect games.

She maintains a 3.5 grade point average, is a member of the Circle of Friends, and is a lunch buddy, library buddy, peer mentor, volunteers at Northwood Church with the Revive program, and also volunteers for Special Olympics.

I extend my sincere congratulations to Ms. Kirsten Shortridge for her efforts and for her success in softball and her academics. Her dedication and commitment serve as an inspiration to all.